

Healing of Bitterness

Key verse: *"I, the LORD, am your healer."* Exodus 15:26.

From the scene of the Lord's great victory over Pharaoh and the songs of deliverance, Moses led his people three days journey into the wilderness. There they encountered their next problem. The water was bitter and undrinkable. They had not learned to live in faith on God and were therefore depending on their environment. This is a natural thing to do, especially for the new Christian. God has a new way of living for all His people and He was beginning to teach them to live it. The lessons they learned are the lessons we need to learn, if we are going to please God, and live effectively as Christians.

They journeyed into the wilderness of Shur. Shur is the Hebrew word for the Egyptian name Etham, the hilly region on the North East of the west arm of the Red Sea. It was Amalakit territory 1 Samuel 27:8, the tribe of people above all others who were persistently hostile toward ancient Israel. We will learn more of them in a later study. Sufficient for now, Amalek is a type of 'the flesh', or self life, in Christian experience. We must learn to live by faith in Jesus Christ rather than the energy of the flesh. This is the setting of today's study.

The water was *Marah*, a Hebrew word meaning grief, discontent, and more generally bitterness. The word expresses their experience as well as the water's condition. Everything was not working as they had supposed it should. Do you know the feeling? We bring much bitterness into our new life in Christ, and the waters must be healed.

Their response was 'to lay it all on' Moses v24. That is the feeling behind the words 'grumbled at'. That's what we do in life when we are chaffed (*marah*) by our experience. We go straight to 'Complaints,' (Malekite territory).

Moses' response was exemplary v25. He

cried to the Lord. '*Cry to*' is a word meaning a call for help, a cry to which God often responded Judges 3:9&15, 6:7, 10:10 etc. The Lord did not chide Moses as He had done at Pi-harhiroth before the Red Sea. There Moses had a momentary lapse of faith and he was asking God for instructions he had already been given (Study 3) but here he comes across an unexpected problem, and the Lord responded immediately to his prayer. God expects His people to call to Him with their problems, and He loves to answer. He has infinite resources to help.

God knew just what to do. From experience we know that God always supplies the answer along with the problem. Just as the dock plant sap will relieve the sting of the nettle, and docks may be found in the same soil as nettles, so it was here. God had provided a tree which, when thrown into the water, purified it. He showed it to Moses. God used this event to teach Moses and the people some deeper truths.

* * * * *

**The LORD told them that
He was their Healer v26.**

This verse comprises one of the names of the LORD (YHWH) in the Old Testament. He said, 'I am YHWH Rapha (to) you.' We know this also

as Jehovah Rapha or "I am the LORD your healer." Just as Jesus of the New Testament is YHWH of the Old Testament and He is for ever the same we may expect Him to be our healer throughout our lives. There are four ways that He does this.

Was the tree:

1. A natural healing commodity, the chemicals of which negated the bitter chemicals in the water? God knew where it was because He had placed it there for this occasion. He showed it to Moses. He often does the same for us.
2. A symbol or emblem? God super-naturally worked when the faith of Moses was in evidence by his obedience. An example parallel passage is 2 Kings 2:19-22 where adding of one pot of salt sweetened the water supply of all Jericho for all time. Symbols like these were used by Jesus in His healing ministry.
3. A pointer to the cross of Jesus? According to Isaiah 53:5:

He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed?

The word 'healed' in this verse means just that. In His suffering Jesus took upon Himself not only the penalty of our sin, but also the root cause of our suffering. We must however be careful not to equate illness (effect) and sin (cause). They ought to be considered separately and carefully. See also Psalm 103:3.

The LORD told them to hear His word and obey His statutes v26.

If they did this then they would be living according to His holiness. Holiness is simply what is in all ways true, right, good and correct.

4. Right living would avoid the illnesses of unholiness they had observed and experienced in Egypt. This is true also for the believer today. If we heed and follow the injunctions of God's word, say in Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 and the like, we will avoid the excesses of alcohol, drugs, sexual diseases, food abuse and so on. Add to this the illnesses caused by anxiety and stress. A body abused is a body inviting all kinds of serious illness.

There are times that God may not remove our illnesses as we may wish These occasions may be:

1. The 'If' of v26. If we disregard God's word we may suffer for it.
2. Sometimes it is a measure of God's discipline. First Corinthians 11.30.
3. We disregard our own health, even for the sake of the Gospel or others, as in Philippians 2:30.
4. Sometimes the Lord allows suffering because He can do more by our limitation than by our strength as in Second Corinthians 12:9.
5. We are not exempt from global conditions of all kinds Matthew 5:44&45.
6. None of us is intended to live here on earth for ever. There is a sickness unto death as in King Hezekiah's time 2 Kings 20:21. The Lord is going to take us home.

Whatever our situation, we can trust the promise He gave to Israel of old:

Even to your old age I will be the same, And even to your graying years I will bear you! I have done it, and I will carry you; And I will bear you and I will deliver you Isaiah 46:4.

Bible quotations in this study are from the NASB.

*W*elcome **Glen Park Gospel Church**
 Lower Road, Eltham North
 Sundays 10.30 am

These notes may be reproduced in part or in full when distributed without cost, with the words 'Used by Permission, Glen Park Gospel Church.' included.